

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 PC-01
EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /064 W
-----171547Z 114043 /43

O R 171320Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4179
INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
CINCPAC
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 NEW DELHI 8743

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, IN
SUBJ: STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS: ASSESSMENT OF THE OUTCOME

REF: NEW DELHI 8600

BEGIN SUMMARY.

1. JANATA'S SWEEPING VICTORY IN EIGHT OF TEN STATES IN
THE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS CAN BE REGARDED AS A STRONG
REAFFIRMATION OF THE POPULAR MANDATE IT RECEIVED FROM
VOTERS THERE IN MARCH AND A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE BY THEM
IN THE DESAI
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GOVERNMENT. THE VICTORY IS EVEN MORE
IMPRESSIVE IN VIEW OF THE UNEXPECTEDLY LARGE MARGINS
WRACKED UP. THE OUTCOME WILL DOUBTELSS BOOST
THE SELF-CONFIDENCE OF JANATA GOVERNMENT LEADERS. THEIR
SELF-ASSURANCE WILL PRESUMABLY ALSO BE HEIGHTENED BY
THEIR BELIEF THAT UNLIKE THE LOK SABHA POLL THE ASSEMBLY
VOTE WAS ESSENTIALLY A PRO-JANATA ONE. ON THE OTHER

HAND, SOME JANATA LEADERS RECOGNIZE THAT THE CONGRESS ROUT IS NOT A TOTALLY WELCOME DEVELOPMENT, SINCE IT HAS ELIMINATED AN EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION IN LARGE PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. JANATA SATISFACTION WILL ALSO BE TEMPERED BY ITS POOR SHOWING IN TAMIL NADU AND WEST BENGAL, A RESULT WHICH HAS REINFORCED THE PARTY'S IMAGE AS A PRE-DOMINANTLY NORTHERN (I.E., HINDI-SPEAKING) ORGANIZATION.

2. THIS SECOND MASSIVE DEBACLE IN THREE MONTHS IS LIKELY TO FURTHER DEMORALIZE THE CONGRESS AND STRENGTHEN THE HANDS OF THOSE ANXIOUS TO OUST MRS GANDHI AND HER ASSOCIATES. THIS EFFORT HAS ALREADY BEGUN. CONGRESS IS ALSO LIKELY TO BE PLAGUED BY A WAVE OF DEFECTIONS, BUT IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO PREDICT WHAT EFFECT THIS WILL HAVE ON THE REMAINING CONGRESS STATE GOVERNMENTS. JANATA LEADERS ARE NOW CONFIDENT THAT THEY CAN EASILY ELECT THEIR CANDIDATE AS PRESIDENT THIS SUMMER, ALTHOUGH A ROUGH CALCULATION SUGGESTS THAT JANATA MAY STILL BE SHORT OF THE NEEDED VOTES AT THE PRESENT TIME. DEFECTIONS TO JANATA IN COMING WEEKS COULD GIVE THE PARTY THE EXTRA VOTES, HOWEVER. THE WAY NOW SEEMS CLEAR FOR PRIME MINISTER DESAI TO CARRY OUT HIS LONG-DELAYED CABINET EXPANSION, AN EXERCISE WHICH WILL BE CLOSELY WATCHED AS A BAROMETER OF THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF VARIOUS FACTIONS AND LEADERS WITHIN THE RULING PARTY. AS EXPECTED, THE TWO ODD MEN OUT IN THIS ELECTION HAVE BEEN WEST BENGAL AND TAMIL NADU4/ *\$ \$8**343,5 43- 9, .
END SUMMARY.

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3. THE OUTCOME OF THE JUNE 10-14 STATE ELECTIONS CAN BE REGARDED AS A STRONG REAFFIRMATION BY THE VOTERS OF THE INDIAN HEARTLAND OF THE MANDATE THEY GAVE THE JANATA PARTY AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL TWO AND A HALF MONTHS EARLIER, AND A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE BY THEM IN THE DESAI GOVERNMENT. THE VICTORY OF THE JANATA PARTY AND ITS PUNJAB ALLY, THE AKALI DAL, IN EIGHT OF THE TEN STATES WHICH WENT TO THE POLLS HAS BEEN MADE EVEN MORE IMPRESSIVE BY THE UNEXPECTEDLY LARGE MARGINS WRACKED UP. AS WE HAVE REPORTED, THE JANATA LEADERSHIP AND MOST OBSERVERS WOULD HAVE CONSIDERED THE WINNING OF 60-65 PERCENT OF THE SEATS AT STAKE IN THE EIGHT STATES A RESPECTABLE SHOWING, AND SUCH AN OUTCOME HAD BEEN WIDELY FORECAST. INSTEAD, THE TALLY IS MORE ON THE 75-80 PERCENT RANGE IN SEVEN OF EIGHT STATES. IN BIHAR, THE JANATA MAJORITY IS SLIGHTLY LOWER AT 66 PERCENT, A STILL RESPECTABLE MARGIN, HOWEVER.

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4. THEIR PARTY'S STUNNING VICTORY IN THE NORTH WILL
DOUBTLESS BOOST THE SELF-CONFIDENCE OF THE JANATA
GOVERNMENT LEAERS AS THEY NOW KNUCKLE DOWN TO DEVISE
AND IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAMS THEY HAD DELAYED PUTTING
FORWARD BECAUSE OF THEIR PREOCCUPATION WITH IMMEDIATE
POLITICAL PROBLEMS. WE HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THIS
SELF-CONFIDENCE HAD BEEN SAPPED SOMEWHAT BY WHAT APPEARED

TO BE THE SUBSTANTIAL PUBLIC DISILLUSION PROMPTED BY
THE WAY THE LEADERSHIP WENT ABOUT DISTRIBUTING PARTY
NOMINATIONS FOR THE STATE CONTESTS. THE REASSURING
IMPACT ON THE JANATA LEADERSHIP OF THE STATE ELECTION
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OUTCOME WILL BE HEIGHTENED BY THEIR BELIEF, WHICH WE

SHARE, THAT UNLIKE THE ANTI-CONGRESS/ANTI-EMERGENCY VOTES OF MARCH, THE ASSEMBLY VOTE WAS ESSENTIALLY A PRO-JANATA ONE. THIS ASSESSMENT OF THE OUTCOME IS STRENGTHENED BY THE DISMAL SHOWING OF THE NUMEROUS INDEPENDENT AND JANATA "REBEL" CANDIDATES. IT CAN CERTAINLY BE ARGUED, AND WILL BE, THAT HAD PEOPLE IN THE HEARLAND BEEN MOVED PRINCIPALLY BY A WISH AGAIN TO REGISTER THEIR DISAPPROVAL OF CONGRESS AND ITS EMERGENCY EXCESSES, THESE CANDIDATES WOULD HAVE WON MANY SEATS AND WOULD HAVE THROWN A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF SEATS TO CONGRESS BY SPLITTING THE ANTI-CONGRESS VOTE. IF THE RESULT OCCURRED. THIS ASPECT OF THE RESULTS IS ALSO LIKELY TO HELP FURTHER THE COHESIVENESS OF THE FLEDGLING PARTY.

5. WHILE CONGRATULATING THEMSELVES ON THEIR NORTHERN VICTORIES, AND ON THEIR SHREWDNESS IN HOLDING EARLY ELECTIONS IN THE POLLED STATES, SOME JANATA LEADERS HAVE ALSO RECOGNIZED THAT THE ROUT OF CONGRESS IS NOT A TOTALLY WELCOME DEVELOPMENT, NOR A PROMISING AUGURY FOR THE EVENTUAL ESTABLISHMENT OF A VIABLE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM IN INDIA. IN SOME STATES, CONGRESS DID NOT EVEN WIN ENOUGH SEATS TO QUALIFY AS AN OFFICIAL OPPOSITION PARTY AND IN OTHERS LIKELY DEFECTIONS FROM CONGRESS RANKS MAY REDUCE IT TO SIMILAR STATUS. JANATA GENERAL SECRETARY NANAJI DESHMUKH TOLD AN EMBOFF YESTERDAY THAT THE OUTCOME WAS DISAPPOINTING IN FAILING TO PROVIDE A STRONG OPPOSITION, IMPORTANT IN HIS VIEW FOR THE EFFECTIVE FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT AND FOR PARTY DISCIPLINE. BOTH UNION MINISTER BAHUGUNA AND LOK SABHA SPEAKER REDDY ALSO SPOKE TO THE AMBASSADOR ABOUT THE DISADVANTAGES OF OVERWHELMING LEGISLATIVE MAJORITIES.

6. JANATA SATISFACTION WILL ALSO BE TEMPERED BY THE POOR SHOWING OF THE PARTY IN BOTH TAMIL NADU AND WEST BENGAL. ALTHOUGH THE OUTCOMES THERE CAN BE RATIONALIZED

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TO SOME EXTENT BY THE FACT THAT BOTH STATES HAVE A HISTORY OF FOLLOWING POLITICAL PATTERNS DIFFERENT FROM THOSE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY, IT IS NONETHELESS TRUE THAT THE STATE ELECTIONS HAVE REINFORCED JANATA'S IMAGE AS A PARTY LARGELY CONFINED TO THE HINDI-SPEAKING BELT PLUS ORISSA, PUNJAB AND GUJARAT. THIS MAY CHANGE AS CONGRESS DEFECTIONS MOUNT, BUT FOR THE MOMENT INDIA'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE APPEARS EVEN MORE REGIONALLY BIFURCATED THAN BEFORE.

7. THIS SECOND MASSIVE DEBACLE IN THREE MONTHS IS LIKELY TO THROW THE CONGRESS INTO AN EVEN DEEPER MORASS OF

DISARRAY AND DEMORALIZATION. SOME OBSERVERS ARE FLATLY PREDICTING THAT THE PARTY IS "FINISHED" FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE: ITS ORGANIZATION WAS MAINLY DIRECTED TOWARD CAPTURING AND MAINTAINING POWER AND REAPING THE TANGIBLE REWARDS THEREFROM. MANY OBSERVERS ARE NOW SAYING THAT IT CANNOT SURVIVE AS AN OPPOSITION PARTY AND THAT IT WILL BE RENT BY DEFECTIONS ON AN EVEN GREATER SCALE THAN THOSE WHICH FOLLOWED THE LOK SABHA POLL. IN ADDITION, AS WE FORECAST EARLIER, A POOR

SHOWING IN THESE ELECTIONS IS LIKELY TO STRENGTHEN THE

HANDS OF THOSE CONGRESSMEN DETERMINED TO "CLEANSE" THE PARTY BY EXPELLING MRS GANDHI AND ALL HER ASSOCIATES. THIS EFFORT HAS ALREADY BEGUN. EVEN AS THE EARLY RETURNS STARTED COMING IN, A SENIOR CONGRESS MP TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT THIS IN EFFECT WAS THE LAST STRAW AND THAT HE HAD INITIATED A SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN AMONG LIKE-MINDED CONGRESSMEN TO "SAVE" THE PARTY BY OUSTING THE FORMER PM AND THE OLD GUARD. THERE IS ALSO TALK OF REQUISITIONING A SPECIAL AICC SESSION THIS SUMMER TO ACCOMPLISH THE SAME END. EVEN A CONGRESS MP FROM THE SOUTH WITH A LONG RECORD OF LOYALTY TO MRS GANDHI CONCEDED TO EMBOFF THAT

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THE PARTY HAD AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE AS LONG AS SHE WAS ASSOCIATED WITH IT. HE ALSO ADMITTED THAT A POSSIBLE SHOWDOWN IN THE AICC OVER MRS GANDHI WOULD PLACE MANY MEMBERS (INCLUDING HIMSELF, IN THE DIFFICULT POSITION OF CHOOSING BETWEEN YEARS OF LOYALTY TO HER AND THE REALIZATION THAT WITHOUT A COMPLETE HOUSECLEANING THE PARTY IS DOOMED. SOME JANATA LEADERS MAINTAIN, HOWEVER, THAT IT MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE WHETHER MRS GANDHI AND COMPANY ARE OUSTED OR NOT; THE CONGRESS WILL BE FORCED TO WANDER IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4181

INFO AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

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AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

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8. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO PREDICT THE EFFECT OF THE INEVITABLE DEFECTIONS ON THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENTS IN MAHARASHTRA, KARNATAKA AND ANDHRA PRADESH. SIMILARLY, THE JANATA LEADERSHIP HAS YET TO UNEQUIVOCALLY STATE ITS POLICY ON ACCEPTING DEFECTORS. WHEN PRESSED BY THE POLCOUNSELOR ON WHETHER THE JANATA GOVERNMENT WOULD INTRODUCE A BILL BANNING DEFECTIONS IN THE CURRENT PARLIAMENT SESSION, GENERAL SECRETARY DESHMUKH WAFFLED, SAYING IT WOULD DEPEND ON WHAT OTHER LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS THERE WAS ON THE AGENDA.

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9. JANATA LEADERS ARE NOW CONFIDENT THAT THEY CAN EASILY ELECT THEIR CANDIDATE AS PRESIDENT OF INDIA THIS SUMMER, AN ASSESSMENT SHARED BY MANY OBSERVERS AND EVEN CONGRESSMEN. A ROUGH CALCULATION BY OUR BRITISH COLLEAGUES, HOWEVER, INDICATES THAT JANATA IS STILL ABOUT 25,000 VOTES SHORT OF THE 223,500 VOTES WHICH IT WILL NEED TO ELECT ITS CANDIDATE UNDER THE WEIGHTED BALLOTING SYSTEM. THE BRITISH THINK THAT JANATA MAY SEEK THE SUPPORT OF THE CPM IN THE PRESIDENTIAL POLL, SINCE THEIR CURRENT TALLY OF SEATS IN WEST BENGAL GIVES THEM SOME 35,000 VOTES. THIS CALCULATION, HOWEVER, DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY OF DEFECTIONS TO JANATA IN THE COMING WEEKS. THUS FAR NO ONE HAS A CLEAR IDEA OF THE POSSIBLE CONTENDERS

FOR THE JANATA NOMINATION. ANOTHER PROBABLE RESULT OF THE JANATA SWEEP IS THAT ONCE THE STATE CHIEF MINISTERS ARE NAMED IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS THE PATH WILL BE CLEAR FOR PRIME MINISTER DESAI TO ACCOMPLISH THE LONG-DELAYED EXPANSION OF HIS CABINET. AS WITH THE SELECTION OF CHIEF MINISTERS, WE EXPECT THAT THE NAMING OF AN ADDITIONAL 20-25 MINISTERS TO THE CABINET WILL BE CAREFULLY WATCHED AS AN INDICATION OF THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF VARIOUS CONTENDING FACTIONS AND LEADERS WITHIN THE RULING PARTY.

10. AS EXPECTED, THE TWO ODD MEN OUT IN THIS ELECTION HAVE BEEN WEST BENGAL WHERE THE CPM-LED LEFT FRONT HAS WON AN OUTRIGHT MAJORITY, AND TAMIL NADU WHERE THE AIADMK ALSO SECURED A MAJORITY. CPM LEADER JYOTI BASU IS LIKELY TO BE THE NEW WEST BENGAL CHIEF MINISTER. CONGEN CALCUTTA REPORTS THAT THE EXTENT OF THE LEFT FRONT SWEEP AND JANATA'S DISMAL SHOWING SURPRISED MOST EVERYONE IN THE STATE. SOME SEE THE RESULT AS A REVERSION TO WEST BENGAL'S NORMAL LEFTIST STANCE, WHILE OTHERS SAY THAT PEOPLE VOTED FOR THE CPM AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING THEIR BENGALI PARTICULARISM. THE CONFIDENTIAL

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JANATA IN WEST BENGAL, WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY THE CONGRESS (O), HAS LITTLE STRENGTH; ITS WEAKNESS WAS MASKED IN THE LOK SABHA POLL BY ITS ALLIANCE WITH THE CPM. LOCAL JANATA LEADERS CONCEDE THEIR ERROR IN NOT REPRATING THIS POLL ALLIANCE AND ARE LIKELY TO LOSE INFLUENCE IN NATIONAL JANATA AFFAIRS. THE CONGRESS WAS VIRTUALLY WIPED OUT IN WEST BENGAL AND IS LIKELY TO SUFFER MASSIVE DEFECTIONS. THE CPM'S MAJOR PRE-OCCUPATIONS AS THE GOVERNING PARTY WILL BE: WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE NAXALITES, HOW TO RESTRAIN THE PARTY'S RANK AND FILE AND HOW TO ESTABLISH GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE CENTER. ALTHOUGH BUSINESS LEADERS AND PROPERTIED CLASSES ARE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT THE FUTURE, THEY THINK THE LEFT FRONT GOVERNMENT WILL TRY TO CORRECT ITS IMAGE FROM THE OLD UNITED FRONT DAYS BY TRYING TO BEHAVE RESPONSIBLY. STILL, THERE IS CONCERN IN CALCUTTA THAT FOR ALL HIS GOOD INTENTIONS BASU MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO KEEP HIS TROOOPS IN LINE AND THAT THE TROUBLES OF THE LATE 1960'S MAY REAPPEAR.

11. THE AIADMK'S VICTORY IN TAMIL NADU AGAIN INDICATES THE STRENGTH OF REGIONALISM IN THE STATE. BETWEEN THEM THE TWO DRAVIDIAN PARTIES WON 178 OF THE 234 SEATS, A RESULT WHICH SUGGESTS IT MAY BE SOME YEARS BEFORE NATIONAL PARTIES WILL GAIN A FOOTHOLD IN TAMIL NADU. ACCORDING TO CONGEN MADRAS THE TOTAL ROUT OF THE JANATA,

HOWEVER, CAME AS A SURPRISE TO MANY OBSERVERS, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF THE MAJOR CAMPAIGN EFFORT WHICH THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP HAD MOUNTED. THE JANATA'S POOR SHOWING MAY BE DUE TO ITS IMAGE AS A NORTHERN, HINDIDOMINATED PARTY. BOTH THE DMK AND CONGRESS TURNED IN CREDITABLE PERFORMANCES, SUGGESTING THAT BOTH MAY STILL HAVE A LIMITED ROLE TO PLAY IN TAMILIAN POLITICS.
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